**Festival of the Epiphany – Year C – January 6, 2013, Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Isaiah 60:1-6 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**“Stand up and Shine in 2013!”**

*“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. 2 See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. 3 Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. 4 “Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm. 5 Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. 6 Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord.*

*(Isaiah 60:1-6)*

What’s that noise? Do you hear it? Oh… it’s the alarm clock. The hand slowly crawls out from the cave of covers, groping around the nightstand for the snooze, and once it finds its mark, it quickly retreats back inot the cave. Moments later the light floods the room scattering the darkness, and a firm voice resounds, “It’s time to get up for school! You’re gonna be late!” Covers are yanked over the head attempting in vain to drown out the light and the noise.

Is that how you feel about 2013? Sometimes we want to crawl under the covers and hide, especially after Christmas. The excitement and fun of Christmas quickly passes. The radio immediately switched back to its original programing the day after Christmas. Christmas decorations have already by replaced by Valentine’s Day in the stores. Your college team didn’t win their bowl game. At least one of your child’s presents already needs to be super-glued. The credit card bill from Christmas presents due to lack of proper budgeting at the beginning of last year looms over your head.

In our Lesson this morning the prophet Isaiah wrote, **“Behold, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples.”** Yes, that describes post-Christmas blues. But the prophet is describing more than that. He is also describing the darkness of this sinful world – of our sins – and of our failures. Perhaps at no other time of the year are our failures evident than at New Year’s. This is time when 45% of Americans make resolutions. Let’s start the new year right with a positive change in behavior.

Maybe you didn’t official make a resolution last year posted to *Facebook* and *Twitter.* But you resolved in your heart to do something. How well did that go? Did you resolve to be better with your finances, to better deal with your PTSD, or help your spouse deal with PTSD better than you did last year, read your bible more, call home more often, not get so angry, be more forgiving, be in church and Bible study more than last year. 2013 doesn’t look so promising if I behave the way I did last year. A little bit depressing...

Then we look at what might be. Will the government get its finances in order this year? If they cannot, will I? Mom and dad’s health is not so good, will funeral preparations be part of 2013? There’s been a lot of fighting in the marriage, will 2013 be filled with a lot of counseling and hard work to strengthen the marriage? What might 2013 hold for you? A deployment, surgery, a major move... do you just want to pull the covers over your head and not come out? And when you ponder last year, and look ahead to the new year, you may wonder, „Where will God be in the darkness of this coming year?“

The good news is that God never leaves us alone in the darkness of this sinful world with all of its what-ifs. He’s always there. He’s always been there. His light is always shining. It is we that put ourselves in darkness. We do that when we do not allow the light of Christ to shine in our hearts. The Light of Christ is the promises that he makes in his Word. He promises that when we study and meditate and learn his Word, he will strengthen us, give us hope, comfort us, give us purpose. He promises that when we take the Lord’s Supper that he will empower us.

But when confronted with the unknown of 2013, the guilt of 2012, instead of running to light of Christ, we crawl under the covers of darkness, and wallow in our sin and fear. Then I not only live in the darkness of my failed resolutions, but also the darkness of my failure to live the way God wants me to. I failed myself this past year, but most regrettabley, I have failed my God. And I don’t feel much like shining in 2013.

But the prophet calls to us to crawl out of our darkness and stand up! **“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.“** (vs1) Just 12 days ago you basked in the glory of the Lord as the angels descended upon lowly shepherds on the hills outside of Bethlehem, “Today is born to you Christ the Lord!” Today we see that same glory in the star that appeared to the Magi - a star that fulfilled a prophecy, “The Christ is born!”

Most of the world celebrates Christmas, not always for the right reasons, and precious few know about the festival of the Epiphany. This is why we celebrate Epiphany – because of this prophecy from Isaiah, **“The prophet said, “Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn.”** (vs3) This is why Epiphany is a such an important festival of the Christian Church – Jesus came as light for the world! Yes, Christ Jesus was born as a Jew, he came to his people, the Hebrews, but he came not to save just his people, but all people. He came as the light of the world – which means he came for you!

Isaiah prophesied that people from all sorts of diverse nations would come to the light of Christ. In the story of the Magi we hear this morning, the prophecy was fulfilled. Here today, as we sit in this church, the prophecy is fulfilled, for us, Gentiles, non-Jewish people! We do not have the privilege of having the Savior born from our race, our heritage. We do not have the patriarchs as part of our family tree, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The covenant and commandments from God himself through Moses, given to the Jews, not to us. But in his grace and mercy God thought to include us, non-Jews, Gentiles. He planned it out that through the light of Christ, he would draw us to himself.

We have a reminder of that truth every time we gather for worship. These flames in the stained glass windows represent the bursts of the glory of the Lord, which, as you notice, emanates from… the cross. The cross, although rugged and stained with blood, an instrument of execution, is the light that draws people in. For on the cross, God’s glory shines in all of its brilliance. There the darkness of our sins, the gloom of our guilt, the dread of the future, the disappointments of our failures before God, were buried deep in Christ’s soul and body, and there died with him.

The cross is God’s glory, because there he solves the problem of my guilt, my failures, my broken resolutions and promises, my fears, and reassures me that there, on the cross, through his own dear Son Jesus, that I am forgiven. How awesome! That God in his love and mercy would do this for me, for you, for the nations of the world!

The glory of God is that he gives me this forgiveness through something else that seems so insignificant but is bursting with God’s glory! And notice that these flames burst of the glory of the Lord, which, emanates also from the shell and water, representing holy Baptism. Baptism is the glory of God, too. At your baptism, the light of faith first shone in your heart. For at your baptism, the light of Christ entered your cold, dead, dark heart, and Christ came to live in you. This is to God’s glory, that he caused us to believe, that he causes us to shine with Jesus.

And he continues to live in you through something that seems so insignificant, but is bursting with God’s glory!

And notice also, that these flames burst the glory of the Lord, which, emanates from the chalice and wheat, which represents the Lord’s Supper. In this simple meal of bread and wine, Jesus reminds us, “I went into the darkness of hell, suffered darkness of your sins, and now give you my body and blood to reassure you, to give you confidence, as you walk out those doors today and go to serve me throughout the week, that you are a forgiven child of God. My light does shine in your heart.”

And notice that these flames, burst forth from the book, the Bible, which is God’s holy, living Word. His glory is that through the simple Word Christ continues to live in you. Through the Word of God, Jesus reminds you of his promises.

Joy that comes over us as it did the Magi when they saw the star. We rejoice! Our hearts throb and swell with excitement. Let us stand up and go to the light in worship and Bible study, in our homes and in this place. Llet us go to the light in Sacrament. Let us bask in the sunlight of Christ, and live with the light of Christ in us.

It is that Light gives us hope, confidence, purpose, strength, direction for 2013… The Light of the world makes this promise to you, “(Heb 13.5) never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5) Do you think you could take that light with you this year? “The LORD will keep you from all harm – he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.” (Psalm 121:8) Would you like to carry that torch with you this year? Or how about this one: “Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” (Psalm 73:23-26) Or these words from Jesus, “Do not worry about tomorrow, or about your clothes, what you will eat or drink; but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness (make daily study of his Word your first new years resolution), and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6)

In our final hymn we will sing, “Speak O Lord.” In this new year we will ask the Lord to speak to us through his Word as we study and meditate on it. For there, in his Word, and in his Sacrament, the light of Christ shines on us and in us, and so, we shine with the brilliance of Jesus. And then, no matter what happens in 2013, with stock market, employment, deployment, good health or poor, wealth or poverty, you will shine in 2013, for the light of Christ shines in you, and on you. Stand up and shine in 2013, for Jesus is your light! Amen.